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SIR WILLIAM OSLER IN GREAT BRITAIN

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THE memory of Sir William Osler in the hearts of his friends and admirers in Great Britain,—and no medical man had so many,—has not become less vivid with the passing years since 1919, when they lost one to whom they could confidently turn in any grave emergency. His associations with Great Britain may be briefly outlined in relation to three periods or phases of his life; the first, of fifteen months in 1872-73, just after his graduation at McGill, was spent at University College working in the physiological laboratory under the late Professor J. Burdon-Sanderson, and in the adjacent hospital and elsewhere at clinical medicine. Some of the fruits of this post-graduate study appeared in two papers on the blood in the *Quarterly Journal of Microscopical Science* (1873) and in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society* (1874).

During the second period, terminating in 1905, when he became Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford, he made frequent visits in the summer months for rest and oppor-

tunities for literary labours in peaceful surroundings though on several occasions there was in addition a special purpose, such as the delivery of the Goulstonian Lectures at the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1885 on endocarditis, and the Cavendish Lecture at the West London Medico-Chirurgical Society in 1899 on the etiology and diagnosis of cerebrospinal fever. When on these visits he would attend in his stride, so to speak, meetings of the British Medical Association. It was during this period that I was fortunate enough to meet him, being introduced to him at the Royal College of Physicians about 1896 and later staying in the same house, that of the late Dr. William Sykes, the Honorary Secretary of the Medical Section, whom he characteristically spoke of as "Bill Sikes", for the Portsmouth meeting of the British Medical Association in 1899. Here he took part in the discussion on the preventive and remedial treatment of tuberculosis opened by his future "brother Reggie of Cambridge", Sir Clifford Allbutt, and read a paper on haemochromatosis, a subject then almost unknown. When he occasionally came round the wards at St. George's Hospital, where he was afterwards Thomas Young Lecturer on Clinical Medicine, it was a pleasantly inspiring experience to watch his careful method of clinical observation and how rapidly he got on friendly terms with everyone; for example, in a case of von Recklinghausen's neurofibromatosis he pointed out thinning of the skin over the multiple tumours, and took a keen interest in noting pulsation of the dorsal veins of the dependent hands in a man with myeloid leukaemia. I remember when at supper on 24th July, 1904, on his return from a visit to the late Sir John Burdon-Sanderson, who had resigned the Regius Professorship at Oxford, and a few days before sailing for America, his humorous query, "Do you think that I am sufficiently senile to be a Regius Professor?" This gave me the erroneous impression that he had no such intention, and I was much surprised and cor-

respondingly delighted when on 17th August the appointment was made public.

On his arrival at Oxford in the spring of 1905, the first house the new Regius Professor took was Number 7 Norham Gardens which, curiously enough, had years before belonged to my father's friend, Goldwin Smith, the Regius Professor of Modern History (1858-1868), who left Oxford as long ago as 1868 to become the first Professor of English and Constitutional History at the then new University of Cornell, and in 1871 moved to Toronto, where in 1910 he died full of years and honours. As Prof W. Max Müller also lived in the Oxford house, it has had a famous record. Among the earliest, in June, 1905, of the crowds of his friends whom I met at Osler's "Open Arms" was Professor Wm. H. Welch, who was over in connection with J. S. Sargent's picture in the Royal Academy (1906) of what may be called "the big four" of Johns Hopkins, Professors Osler, W. S. Halsted, W. H. Welch, and Howard Kelly; this fine painting* appropriately marked the first break in the memorable combination which in less than twenty-five years had raised the new Medical School of the Johns Hopkins University to the premier position in America.

This short and personal contribution to an international subject is advisedly headed "*Sir William Osler in Great Britain*" rather than in Oxford or England, for Oxford was but the centre from which he and his activities radiated far beyond the geographical boundaries of England. Soon becoming the real though unobtrusive motive power in British medicine, he quietly gathered round him some younger men to start the Association of Physicians of Great Britain and Ireland, which held its first meeting in 1907; *The Quarterly Journal of Medicine*, which began in the same year, was most intimately linked with the Association, for the members of the Editorial Board were, with the exception of Sir Wilmot Herringham, who

* This famous portrait is reproduced in this volume, opposite page 260.

became the Honorary Secretary of the Association, the same as those who had been inspired to launch the Association, and Osler was of course its father. It was characteristic of him that, though the originator of the Association, he did not take the chair at the initial meeting of what to all intents and purposes was a replica of the Association of American Physicians of which he had been President in 1895. His personal influence was electric, widespread, and immediate; it was natural for him to encourage young men by word of mouth or by a friendly line conveying congratulations on a published paper, and it was his delight to collect men to meet and know medical visitors from America or the Continent at pleasant dinners at the Athenaeum. As President of the Section of Medicine of the International Congress of Medicine in London (1913) he set a fine example of genial and splendid hospitality. In constant demand, he was necessarily much in London, often for several days in consecutive weeks, and took an active part at the Royal Society of Medicine, where he was President of the Clinical Section and first President of the Section of the History of Medicine.

Overworked and grievously stricken by the loss of his only son Revere during the war, he never gave in, though the change was plain to his friends; in 1919, the last year of his busy life, when he had the address, "The Old Humanities and the New Science", for the Classical Association hanging over him, he undertook the Presidency of the Fellowship of Medicine and Post-Graduate Association, which was struggling with the extremely difficult task of establishing an efficient post-graduate scheme in London. In the campaigns against tuberculosis and especially against venereal disease he was an energetic and eloquent leader, and indeed it is difficult to think of any avenue in medical progress in which he was not among the pioneers. In his charming memoir of William Pepper he quoted from Matthew Arnold's "Rugby

Chapel" and it is difficult not to apply to him the lines:

> "O strong soul by what shore
> Tarriest thou now? For that force,
> Surely, has not been left vain!
> Somewhere, surely, afar,
> In the sounding labour-house vast
> Of being, is practised that strength
> Zealous, beneficent, firm!"

Essentially a humanist, Sir William linked up medicine with other branches of learning, and his sympathetic and broad-minded culture was recognized by his election as President of the Bibliographical Society for the unprecedented period of seven years, and of the Classical Association in 1918, the latter being the first occasion on which a medical man had been chosen for this high honour and thus a tribute to one of the most notable facets of his personality—that of the Scholar-Physician. His early devotion to morbid anatomy never faded, and accordingly he took a keen interest in the contents of museums, though books, which may be regarded as museums of observations and thoughts that would otherwise be isolated or lost, were his ruling passion. He was a great collector of knowledge, ideas, and of the affections of men, and that he was the beloved physician, the like of whom we shall not look upon again, was the outcome of his ideals "to do the day's work well and not to bother about the future", and "write me as one that loves his fellow men".